

Congressional Support for Historic Preservation in 2009

National-level partnering preservation organizations respectfully request improvements to federal-level preservation funding and incentives for historic preservation activities in 2009, including: incentives for historic home rehabilitation, improved incentives for commercial historic rehabilitation activity, funding for historic preservation projects, and adequate funding for mandated historic preservation programs.

Support Historic Preservation within the Reauthorized Transportation Bill

As Congress considers legislation to reauthorize America's surface transportation law, we urge you to support four reauthorization priorities directly related to historic preservation.

Financial Support for State and Tribal Reviews

We urge Congress to authorize and facilitate the flexible use of transportation funds to provide assistance to state and tribal historic preservation officers (SHPOs) and (THPOs), and to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to help expedite historic preservation reviews and consultations. SHPOs and THPOs review thousands of federally funded transportation projects every year that have an enormous affect on historic resources, sustainable development, and our nation's communities. Unfortunately, these officers are chronically underfunded, which hinders their ability to perform their required duties under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Transportation Enhancements

We urge Congress to protect the transportation enhancements program, the largest source of funding for historic preservation in the federal budget. The program authorizes states to set aside ten percent of their federal-aid highway allocations for matching grants to fund projects that enhance community transportation investments. Six of the twelve eligible activities involve historic preservation, such as the rehabilitation of historic bridges, roads, and depots, and historic downtown streetscape revitalization. In the past 16 years, the enhancements program has funded 23,000 projects that strengthen the links between historic preservation, smart growth, transit-oriented design, infrastructure investment, and enhance the quality of life for communities throughout the country.

Protect NEPA and Section 4(f)

We urge Congress to ensure that the essential safeguards of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act are protected. These laws, which have been on the books for 40 years, have effectively protected historic and natural resources, and ensured that the public voice is heard in the transportation planning process.

Funding Flexibility for Historic Bridges

We urge Congress to include an amendment proposed by the administration and adopted by the Senate in the 108th Congress that would strengthen existing financial incentives for local governments or private organizations to take ownership of historic bridges that are no longer used for vehicles. Incentive grants could be up to double the estimated costs of demolition. The amendment would also eliminate a weak spot in current law that prohibits local bridge owners from combining these incentive grants with transportation enhancement funds. This increased flexibility – even without any increase in funding – would help local agencies finance the costs of rehabilitating and reusing historic bridges, and preserve America's community-serving historic infrastructure. (23 USC § 144(o))

Reinvest in America's Older Communities

We urge Congress to use transportation funds to support sustainable development by repairing and reinvesting in roads, sidewalks and public transportation systems in older, rural and urban communities. Support transit-oriented development in existing neighborhoods but include protections for historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Preservation is Sustainability.